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# Learning to fly the airborne way

**By SPC Jeremy Heckler**  
*Iguana Editor*

Stand up, hook up, and shuffle to the door. Jump right out and count to four.

Many soldiers have heard this cadence since they were in basic training, but going through the training and actually jumping is another matter all together.

Airborne training is one of the most intense training programs that the Army has. Soldiers from all walks of life volunteer for the program and the opportunity to wear the silver jump wings.

The training begins at Fort Benning, Ga., home of the airborne school. For three weeks soldiers are molded into airborne troopers, training for any emergency that could happen the moment they leave the aircraft.

"The month of airborne is the crawl phase," said SFC Andy Ramirez, of contracting. "It beats up your body as you learn how to do parachute landing falls."

The trainees build up to the final jump week, where they must perform a tactical jump, which includes not only the jump equipment, but a full combat load.

To continue to jump, soldiers must get continual refresher training before they hook up and stare out the open door of the aircraft for a jump. Soldiers are required to jump once every three months to maintain minimum proficiency. Most soldiers in airborne units jump once a month to maintain their expertise.

"This is one of the most high-risk training programs we have in the Army; the weapons ranges are another one," said Rodriguez. "Safety is always an issue."

With each jump, soldiers review those basic techniques.

"During the pre-jump briefing, the soldiers are given a briefing on the layout of the drop zone and then rehearse how to land and to deal with any malfunction," said MSG Erich Kuehnle, air operations NCO. On a recent jump with Honduran paratroopers, soldiers had to be familiar with wires and possible water landings near the drop site. They also go through procedures for any type of malfunction with the parachute.

"This training is mandatory for all jumpers for safety purposes," said Kuehnle. "Every jumper knows what he has to do in the aircraft, while in the air

*See Airborne, Page 4*



*Photo by Martin Chahin*

**The ultimate goal of all airborne troops is a safe landing.**



*Photo by SPC Jeremy Heckler*

**COL Michael Wood, JTF-Bravo commander and LTC Wayne Deneff, ARFOR commander, demonstrate the proper technique for moving with a static line as part of airborne refresher training.**



## Commander's Corner

# Expanding to 'New Horizons' after the Cold War

By MAJ Paul Dulchinos  
Engineering

As a brand new second lieutenant almost 15 years ago, I arrived in northern Germany fresh out of the Engineer Officer's Basic Course. The Cold War was raging and the concept of "Air Land Battle" was the Army doctrine of the day. Everything was armored and mechanized and our enemy was clearly defined. Ours was a noble mission as we were the defenders of the free world. Although the war was cold, the threat was all too real.

We knew that if the Soviet hoard crossed the Fulda Gap, it could mean the beginning of World War III. As we stared down our adversaries along the East and West German border, we practiced our general defense plans (GDPs) and prepared for the worst. Still, with this bipolar arrangement, we felt a certain degree of comfort with its predictability. It was presumed that as long as they were there and we were here, a fear of mutual assured destruction would prevent the other side from acting. As a mechanized combat engineer platoon leader, my soldiers continually practiced battle drills for laying row mine fields and conducting in-stride breaches with explosives.

This all changed in November 1989, when the Berlin Wall came crumbling down and the iron curtain was drawn wide open. Suddenly, military planners were thrust out of their comfort zones and we were forced to look at a new multi-dimensional world full of unpredictable threats. Two versions of Field Manual 100-5 (Operations) later, and we now acknowledge the necessities and virtues of preparing for military operations other than war (MOOTW). However, this role for

our nation's military is no less noble than our prior commitment to being the defenders of the free world. In fact, supporting MOOTW is not a new concept at all. Our military has been performing these types of missions throughout its history. Even during the hottest of conflicts, military operations other than war have been conducted (often times concurrently).

The main underlying theme in MOOTW is to win the hearts and minds of those we are called upon to defend. Our commitment to these operations goes well beyond our military's desire to maintain job security in today's kinder and gentler world.

Conducting and supporting military operations other than war makes sense. MOOTW helps prevent the prospect of future hot or cold wars by stabilizing a region.

Here at Soto Cano Air Base, we are currently on the forefront of our military's shift towards support of military operations other than war. Even our task force's missions, like those of the military, have evolved over the last 18 years. We have seen the focus of our support shift from higher intensity MOOTW operations (those conducted during the height of the Cold War), to those operations more humanitarian in nature. Our current support of New Horizons exercises, MEDRETE, humanitarian de-mining operations, counter-drug operations and disaster relief operations are all testimony to our military's commitment to MOOTW.

Now, as a major serving in Honduras 15 years later, I am seeing with pride the results of our military's transformation. Dangerous land mines like those my soldiers once trained to emplace on the German plains are now being successfully removed in Nicaragua, through Joint Task Force-Bravo support. Our efforts will help protect the children and future generations of Central

America. In addition, through support of nation building exercises like New Horizons, JTF-Bravo is also helping develop the infrastructures of all the countries in Central America. The newly constructed New Horizons schools and medical clinics directly touch the lives of the citizens living within our mission area.

MEDRETE also provide much needed humanitarian medical care to the infirm of Central America and counter-drug support helps stem the tide of illegal narcotics into the United States. This mission helps protect the lives of our own children.

Most recently in 1998, JTF-Bravo had the opportunity to provide disaster relief support to the country of Honduras, in response to the devastation of Hurricane Mitch.

Our actions helped reduce the pain and suffering of the people in this region and enabled Honduras to achieve a swift and thorough recovery from one of the greatest natural disasters to ever strike Central America.

Here at Soto Cano Air Base, we all have a unique opportunity to directly and indirectly impact the lives of neighbors in Central America, while serving our nation's military. Ours is truly a noble cause.

## Chaplain's Corner

# The ultimate Christmas present

By Chaplain (CPT) Arleigh vonSeggern  
JTF-Bravo Chaplain

I had a friend of mine who made arrangements for his own radio program on a local station near Colorado Springs, Colo. He purchased the airtime, as well as production equipment for his own programs. On Sunday evenings, his program, "Fun With the Word" was aired. It was not your typical "Christian" program because there was always a twist. I recall his Christmas program, where he went out to "the highways and byways" to interview the man on the street about this phenomenon called "Christmas."

He got all kinds of answers, like the family gatherings, singing, food, decorations, and so on. A word that kept reoccurring was "presents." It was about giving and receiving of presents. At this time of year, many of us agonize and spend much time searching for the right present for the person on our list. We want to give them something they need and will use.

How about a person shopping for us? What do we need? If we could get one present, and one present

only, and the cost was no object what would we put down on our wish list? We may not think about food or clothing, we already have that. We may think about something we really need. And what do we really need? If we take a serious look at ourselves, we cannot help but notice that we do fall short of the glory of God and his expectation for us, and we find ourselves helpless to do anything about it. And we respond, "Lord, if you can, do something about the sin in my life."

The good news is that the Lord not only can, but also does. It is very clear that God met the greatest need of ours—forgiveness. He accomplished this, to borrow a phrase from a greeting card company, "when you care enough to send the very best." "For when the fullness of time had come; God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law."

God himself gave to us the greatest gift of all. He sent his son into our world, someone who would bear the punishment that you and I deserve because of our sinfulness. Everything we may dream about receiving as a Christmas present is small compared to the ultimate Christmas present given by God himself!

## The Iguana



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That's your opinion

## What are your Christmas plans?

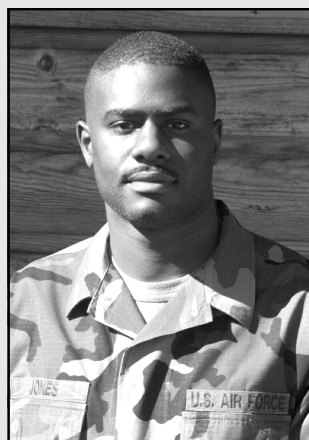


*"I'm going to spend the holidays with my wife and her family here in Honduras. We are going to one of the local towns for a Christmas carnival."*

PFC Elias Odar  
ARFOR

*"I'm going to spend Christmas here with my fellow airmen. We are going to throw a Christmas party for two local orphanages."*

Capt. Clint McCommon  
AFFOR



*"I'll be unloading trucks for Christmas and helping make people at Soto Cano smile with gifts, cards and letters from home."*

Staff Sgt. Cory James  
AFFOR

*"I hope to have a quiet Christmas, although I'm going to spend it Honduran style. I also plan on calling home and wishing my family a Merry Christmas. They are very important to me."*

CPT Benjamin Simpson  
MEDEL



## Shinseki honors contributions, well wishes during holidays

By GEN Eric Shinseki  
Army Chief of Staff

As the first year of the new millennium comes to a close, we pause to reflect on the remarkable contributions that American soldiers have made to the nation and the world throughout our history. Over 225 years ago, our forefathers ushered in a new era dedicated to democracy and liberty. The spirit of independence that they kindled produced a nation that today is acknowledged as the greatest testament to the human spirit in the history of man: a nation so committed to the blessings of peace, hope and liberty that it sends its best sons and daughters into harm's way to keep the flame of freedom burning for all mankind.

Preserving liberty requires tremendous personal sacrifice. Like our forefathers, many of whom gave their young lives to the cause of liberty, today's soldiers willingly shoulder the heavy burden of standing guard on the frontiers of freedom. Each day, from Kosovo to Korea, from Saudi Arabia to the East Timor, and in 60 other countries, men and women of the United States Army face

the possibility of danger; they willingly sacrifice the comforts of home and family so that others may remain safe and secure.

The men and women of the U.S. Army are the best at what they do. Highly trained and highly motivated, they know that the freedom and security of our nation depend on their ability and dedication.

They serve out of a love for what America represents - liberty, justice and respect for human dignity. They serve because they know that they are mankind's best hope for bringing peace, order and stability to the most troubled areas of the world.

America is profoundly grateful and indebted to you, the American soldier, for everything you do.

As you celebrate this holiday season, many of you deployed far from home, may each of you find satisfaction in the knowledge that because of you, America is a safer and better place; that because of you, America remains a shining beacon of hope to the less fortunate people of the world who look to us for leadership.

We wish you a happy and safe holiday season and a peaceful new year.

## Army offers online tech courses

By Joe Burtas  
Army News Service

WASHINGTON — Active-duty and reserve soldiers, and Department of Army civilians can continue to take free online information technology courses thanks to a recently renewed contract between the Army and SmartForce, a commercial computer-based training company.

Since the Army first started offering the service in 1998, the course catalog has grown to offer training on more than 1,100 technical subjects.

"Rather than send people away from their jobs to half a dozen places for training, why not save time and money by having them sign up for online courses," said LTC Tom Loper, the program's project manager. "We opted to offer this education to both the civilian and soldier workforce. In an increasingly technology-based Army, these classes not only make students smarter at their jobs but give them more marketable skills for future jobs — inside or out of the military."

The program is offered on the web at [www.armycbt.army.mil](http://www.armycbt.army.mil).

The classes range from how to use word-processor, database and spreadsheet programs for beginner through advanced users to 70 certification-preparation courses for systems administrators and computer programmers.

While all the classes are free for reg-

istered users, the program does not offer actual certifications.

Arrangements for certification testing and associated testing fees - often costing several hundred dollars - must be made through commercial vendors. Links to those vendors are posted on the Army CBT web page.

Additionally, many of the offered courses may qualify for college credit. Loper recommended those interested in getting college credit for SmartForce classes check with their local Army Education Services office to determine which qualify and what costs may be involved through a college or university.

Currently, the instruction is primarily text-based with some graphics and photos.

SmartForce plans to offer streaming video for instructor lectures in the future when available bandwidth is large enough, Loper said.

Online mentoring service is also offered on a limited basis.

To date, 70,000-plus registered Army users have used the SmartForce instruction.

To register or view the course catalog, visit the Army CBT web site. Registration must be made on a computer tied into an Army wide-area network using a military domain address.

However, once the registration is complete, students may log on with a student number and password at home, a local library or on any other computer connected to the Internet.

Dec. 15, 2000

JTF-Bravo

## Holiday fire safety guidelines

By TSgt. Troy Wright  
Fire Department

As the holidays approach, the Soto Cano Fire Department is urging all base residents to look for and eliminate potential dangers from holiday lights and decorations that could lead to fires and injuries. We suggest following these tips to make your holiday a safe one.

### Trees:

- Only artificial trees are authorized on Soto Cano Air Base. When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "fire resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.

### Lights:

- Indoors and outdoor use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, which indicates conformance with safety standards.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use. Lights that are sold in the BX/PX meet these standards.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, hootch walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. Or, run strings of lights through hooks (available in the BX/PX).
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave your room. The lights could short out and start a fire.

### Decorations:

- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree or decorate your living area or work place.
  - The use of candles for decoration or any other use is prohibited.
- Contact TSgt. Troy Wright, assistant chief of fire prevention, at ext. 4553/4343/4818 with any questions or concerns dealing with holiday safety concerns.

## Airborne

(Continued from Page 1)

and on the ground. It doesn't matter if they have had five jumps or 500, sustained airborne training minimizes the risks."

On a recent mission, the jumpers had to understand how to jump from the back of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

"A helicopter is different because when you're out the doors there isn't the blast from the jet stream pushing you out, you just drop straight down," said Ramirez. He added that some of the risks involve times when the parachute fails to deploy and the soldier is literally hanging from the edge of the aircraft. Before the jump, the aircrew explains the procedure for such an instance, as well as any other eventuality.

Each airborne soldier is a volunteer and can back out at any time, even if it's at the open door of the aircraft.

"It happens every so often," said MAJ Ken Downer, ARFOR Operations officer. "Even though we all volunteer, there is still some apprehension. Soldiers who volunteer learn to conquer their fear."

"Everyone is nervous but they know what they are doing," said Ramirez. "This is fun, but not a game."

### Movie Schedule

Saturday, Dec. 16 4 p.m.  
**Pay it Forward (PG-13)**

Saturday, Dec. 16 7:15 p.m.  
**Meet the Parents (PG-13)**



Sunday, Dec. 17 4 p.m.  
**Little Vampires (PG)**

Sunday, Dec. 17 7:15 p.m.  
**Bedazzled (PG-13)**



Photo by 1st Lt. Kim Garbett

Rick Monroe belts out lyrics while Christopher Maloney rocks on the bass during one of Possum's performances at The Oasis Club.

## Possum rocks The Oasis Club

**'World's toughest band' plays own brand of rock in three-night engagement**

By 1st Lt. Kim Garbett  
Public Affairs

The "World's Toughest Band" stopped by Honduras for a three-night house party shortly after Thanksgiving and rocked on for Soto Cano's listeners at The Oasis. Possum, an L.A.-based, four-person band on a DoD tour, brought with them their own brand of modern and roots rock, and played a variety of other musical genres while they were at it. According to many of the listeners at The Oasis each night jamming with the charismatic group, their music was anything but possum-esque.

This international band of rockers is no stranger to performing for today's military men and women, no matter where in the world they may be located. Possum has performed dozens of live shows in Bosnia, Kosovo, Hungary, Hong Kong and Vietnam. They even had to be airlifted out of their final show in Central Europe due to an increase in enemy activity in that area.

After Honduras, Possum bassist Chris Maloney said the group was headed to Ecuador and then to the Bahamas. Maloney mentioned that it's been fascinating to work in so many countries and to interact with today's men and women in the profession of arms.

The band enjoys providing a source of entertainment for Soto Cano and other military members worldwide. Maloney

said the group had really enjoyed their time at Soto Cano and had the opportunity to see the waterfalls near Lake Yojoa also and had a chance to tour the base from the perspective of a firefighter on the Fire Dawgs fire truck.

Crowd members at The Oasis enjoyed the rockers display and energetic performance.

"I think it's great that MWR is bringing bands out here, but I really think they should try harder to play them on the weekend," said 1LT Tim Vivian, MEDEL. The band played from Tuesday through Thursday the week after Thanksgiving.

"Overall, however, the band is really good; they're playing some good alternative music and some of my favorites ...like Grand Funk Railroad. They also played some originals as well as retro and classic rock," said Vivian.

SMSgt Bob Jenkins, Soto Cano's fire chief, saw the band perform all three nights.

"They're great!" Jenkins said. "A lot of the songs they're playing are originals and they're doing cover songs of other groups. It's also pretty interactive with guys getting up there with the band to do karaoke."

"(The Fire Dawgs) gave them a tour of the fire station, and they had the chance to ride in one of the fire trucks," added Jenkins. "We just wanted to show our appreciation for them coming here. The two bands MWR has brought in here have been really great. It's a nice change of pace, too. It's hard to get bands to come all the way to Honduras, but Scott (Brennan, MWR director) has been doing a great job."



# Learning, growing through use of martial arts class

By SPC Jeremy Heckler  
Iguana Editor

"I come in peace and will fight if I have to but I will leave in peace."

That is the motto of those who practice martial arts. Self-protection and bettering one's inner and outer self is the goal for these people.

Each Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday in the MWR aerobics room, personnel on Soto Cano challenge their mind and body with martial arts.

The class is a combination of limpo *shaolin kung fu* and *aikido*, said Elijah Felder, sensei for the class.

The class begins with a series of warm up exercises and meditation.

"Meditation deals with the inner spirit as well as the body and mind," said Felder.

Felder is equal parts teacher and drill instructor at times, giving remedial stamina exercises to those who have forgotten what they have been taught.

Students then are introduced to a series of stances. Felder calls out the stance and one of his more experienced students demonstrates the move to the rest of the class.

"My students must learn to execute all of the moves properly and then we will go into falls. You must execute your falls properly or they can do more damage than protection," said Felder.

The more experienced students learn throws and grabbing moves as well as utilizing pressure points, said Felder.

Experienced students also impart what they learn to the newcomers.

"I give experienced people the chance to get involved in teaching," said Felder. "It also lets people know that this is a soft art that anyone can learn."

"This is a part of learning because there is always something new to learn," said Gary Witt, a member of Lockheed Martin. Witt has been practicing martial arts for eight years. The style used in the class is different from the kempo karate that he studied.

"I come from a basic Japanese style that is more kicking and punching, this is more aikido and *jujitsu* where you can take someone down without doing damage," said Witt. He added that police officers use similar techniques when restraining suspects.

After practicing the basic stances, the class practices falls and different techniques.

Part of the training involves the ability to take a fall without injury. Novices practice on a foam mat.

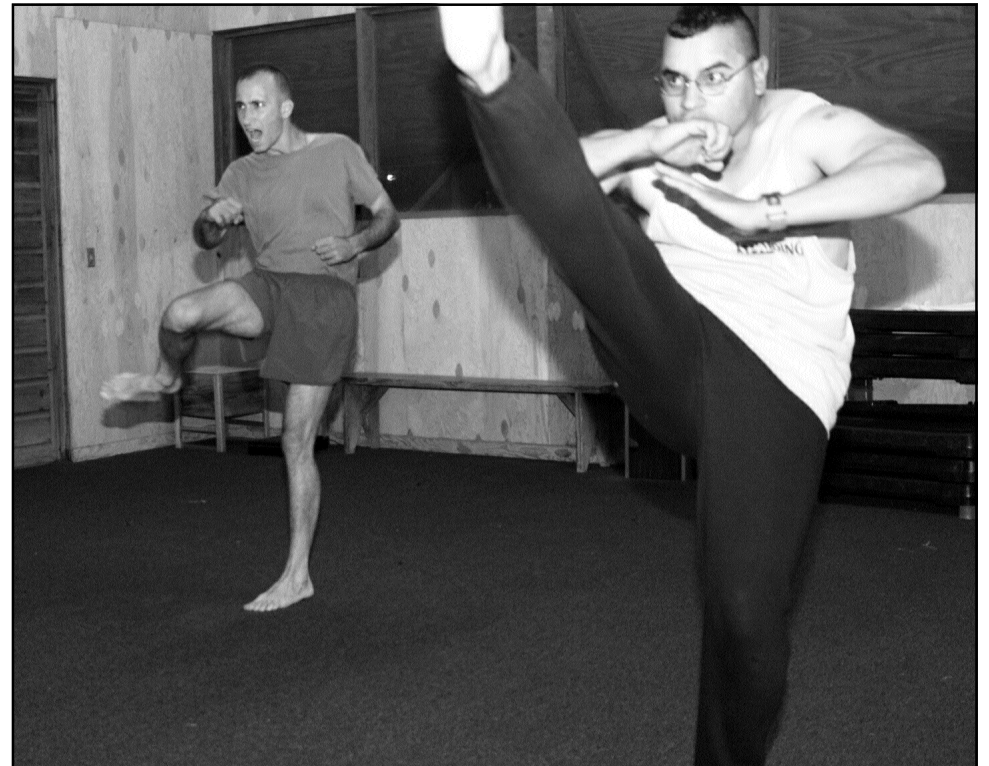
With the transient nature of the personnel on Soto Cano, Felder does not award belts for skill levels in his class.

"With all the people who come in and go I just want people to see improvement," said Felder.

Many of the students in Felder's class bring their style of martial arts to the class, sharing what they have learned as well as picking up a few new skills.

"I wanted to continue training, and this class has given me something new and has allowed me to broaden my martial arts experience," said CPT Jeremie Siegfried of MEDEL who possesses a black belt in Tae kwon do.

She said that she uses martial arts to



Photos by SPC Jeremy Heckler

**SGT Alfredo Acosta and another member of the class practice one of the moves taught in the martial arts class.**

relieve stress.

"Martial arts is a great way to relieve tension and is a great confidence builder mentally and physically," said Siegfried.

Siegfried, the only female in the class, said that martial arts are not just for strong men.

"It takes only minimal strength to do a throw, and you don't need brute strength to defend yourself," said Siegfried. "A woman can take out anyone; they just need to be willing to try."

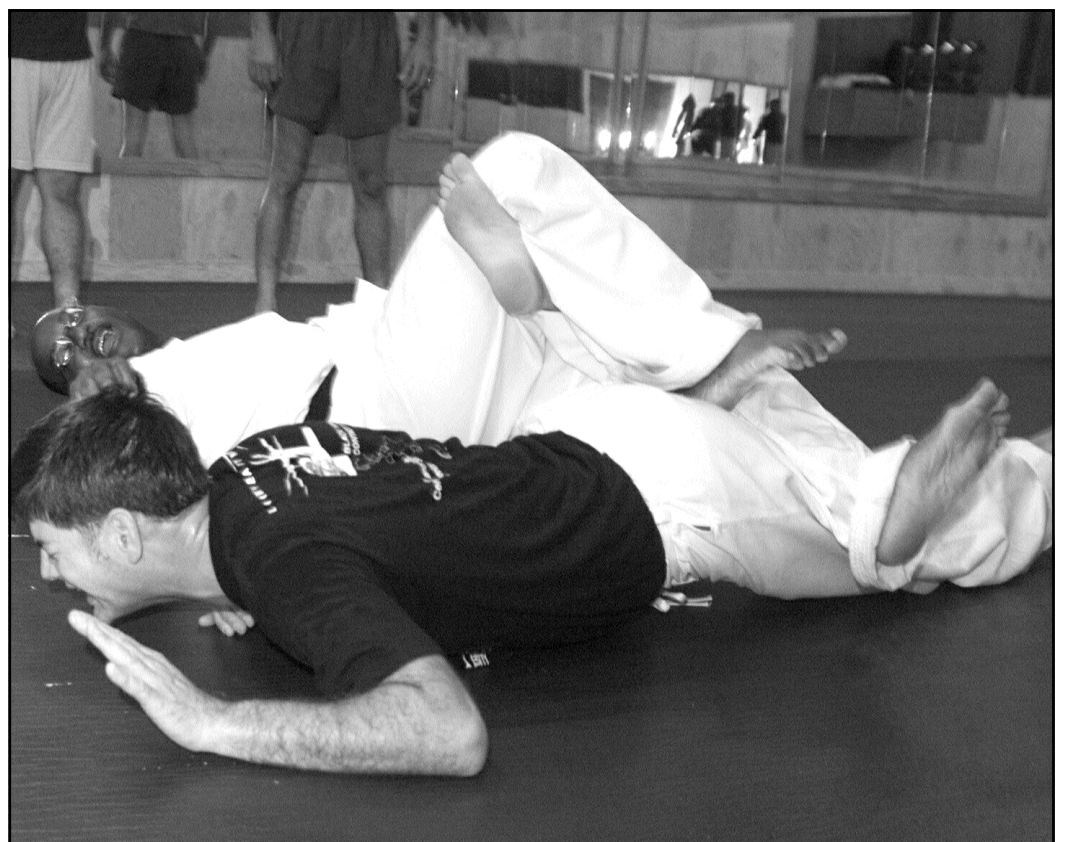
"I've been here eight times now, so I'm relatively new," said SPC Joe Paramo, 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment.

"When I took the class I wasn't too surprised about what went on because I had a basic idea of what it's like," said Paramo.

Paramo added that he works with several of the students in the class who helped him ease into the class at a good comfort level.



Felder gives extra training to a new student during a break in the action. New students are taught the basic moves and techniques.



Elijah Felder, sensei of the martial arts course, demonstrates a technique to subdue an opponent.



Photos by 1st Lt. Kim Garbett

SGT Sheldon Thomas works the board and gives the audience the rundown during "The Lizard After Dark."



MAJ Joelle Rankins, a.k.a. Maritza, looks over her playlist during her lunchtime show on the Power Lizard.

## Power Lizard jams with guest DJs

By 1st Lt. Kim Garbett  
Public Affairs

A few of the music lovers of the world spin the CDs for all to hear at Soto Cano. They devote time to planning shows, going on air, picking the grooviest tunes in their musical areas, programming the computer and playing anything from rhythm and blues, to contemporary jazz, to a motley collection of jamming Christian. They are the guest DJs of the Power Lizard, the volunteers who add spice to your day and night and variety of listening for all. Let's introduce a few of our local stars now:

On-air personality "Maritza" breaks out the early 1980's Madonna hit, "Material Girl," as her trademark opening for her show. Director of Intelligence at Joint Task Force-Bravo, MAJ Joelle Rankins, a.k.a. "Maritza," devotes three lunch hours a week to kicking up what she calls "old school jams" over the air. From 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, "Maritza" volunteers at the Power Lizard, 106.5 FM, where the crew there trained her on their equipment use and how to develop as an on-air personality. Her musical genres typically include Rhythm and Blues from the late 1960s through the 1980s. She also likes to throw in a little classic rock and roll every once in a while, and helps get the word out on JTF-Bravo upcoming events and policies.

Maritza, a graduate in broadcasting and film from the University of Oregon, is a natural ham. While volunteering at the radio show, she also has the opportunity to do what she loves.

"This is what I wanted to do when I 'grew up,'" Rankins said. "This is just the first time I've actually been able to have the opportunity to do this. It's a lot of fun, and it's something I've always wanted to do. I also like being part of the community wherever I go, and (being a guest DJ) helps me be a part of the Soto Cano community."

From the fun-spirited lunchtime R&B to evenings of contemporary jazz, comes another Power Lizard volunteer, who sends a copy of each of his personally designed musical showcases home to his mother. "And this show tonight is respectfully dedicated to my mother, who without her, I would not be inspired to be where I'm at today," said SGT Sheldon Thomas of ARFOR. He single-handedly powers up "The Lizard After Dark" on Sunday and Wednesday nights from 8 to 10 p.m., where nouveau jazz beats put one in a New Orleans kind of mood. It takes about an hour or so to prepare one of his shows, Thomas said.

"This is the first time since 1991 that I've had a chance to be an on-air personality again," said Thomas. Thomas graduated with a degree in criminology from Texas A&M University, where one of his friends introduced him to the radio world and showed him how to operate a radio station.

"I've been interested in it ever since," he said, "but the operations tempo back at Fort Bragg is so high ... we're either preparing for a deployment, on a deployment or coming back from one ... that there isn't much opportunity to do something like this regularly there. SGT Curt Phillips (Armed Forces Network, station manager) has given me a great opportunity."

Thomas brings his own collection of over 150 contemporary jazz CDs from the 1980s and 90s

with him to the station. "I enjoy doing this show a lot; it allows me to hear a radio station with every song I like. It also allows me to share what I like with other people. I was truly surprised when I started this up how many people had wanted a contemporary jazz spot. And being an on-air personality is definitely something I'd like to pursue in the future..."

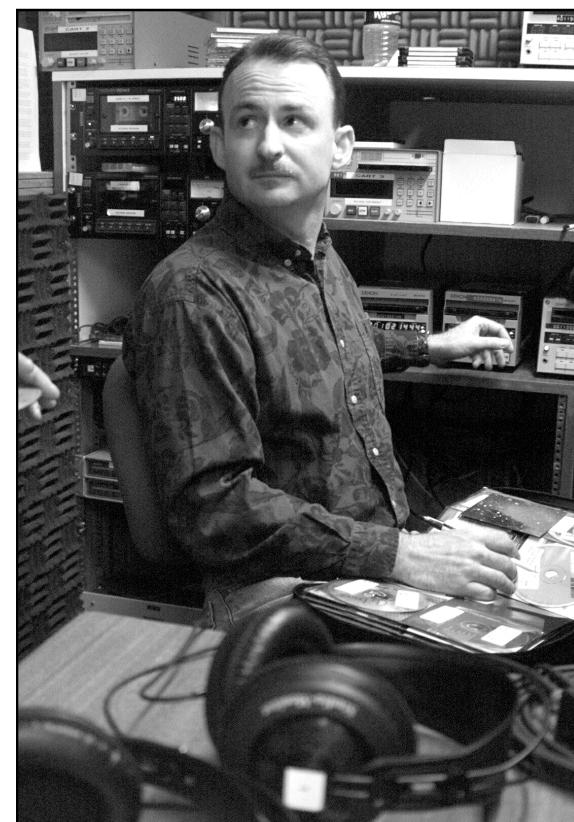
A collection of other DJs swap out a couple of Christian radio shows throughout the week. TSgt. Victor Harris of AFFOR supply and SrA. Jason Kamp of AFFOR radar took the reins for "The Night Watch" from 8 to 10 p.m. on a particular Thursday night in the none-too-distant past. "'The Night Watch' features soft jazz and blues Christian beats, but we like to mix it up occasionally," said Harris.

Kamp concurred, "I don't think people realize that everything there is in the secular world we have in Christian, only it's better. We have anywhere from worship to gospel, pop, rap, R&B, rock, reggae, alternative, Latin and jazz..." Kamp has a wealth of experience with Christian music, so creating a show comes naturally to him; he played in three bands at his last base and all were praise bands for churches.

Harris mentioned that a lot of the music they play is from their personal collections, but they also have a sponsor in the United States, Malaco Christian Distribution, that has sent them more than 150 CDs to use on air.

Harris said he really enjoys hosting the show. "It helps pass the time and allows us a chance to share the gospel and God through music," he said. "The guys here at the station have been great as well. They encourage us to be creative and don't limit our selection of music. They're always there to help us if we have any technical difficulties or questions, too."

For more information about getting a radio show, call the Power Lizard at ext. 4348.



TSgt. Victor Harris checks with SrA. Jason Kamp as they pick songs for "The Night Watch," their Christian radio program.



# Have a Cigar!

By Master Sgt. Pat McKenna  
Public Affairs

When I was a kid, I hated cigars. It reminded me of my Uncle Paul, who smelled like a barroom ashtray. He always had a soggy, half-chewed stogie hanging out of the corner of his mouth. Merely looking at that nasty cigar induced the gag reflex in me. So after that traumatic childhood experience, I swore, as a youngster growing up in Mystic, Conn., that I'd never smoke.

So it's some 30 years later, I now live in Honduras and I've turned into my Uncle Paul.

Before I go any further, I feel it's necessary that I give you the military's obligatory anti-smoking spiel. So here it is — Don't smoke. It's bad for you!

Before coming to Honduras, I maybe smoked a couple dozen cigars in my entire lifetime. But since arriving here less than a year ago, I've equaled that number. Now, don't think Honduras drove me to take up vices and bad habits. It's just that I can't pass on such a great bargain. Honduras makes some of the finest cigars in the world, rivaling Cuba's and Nicaragua's, and they're dirt-cheap.

So when I heard that MWR offers day trips to a cigar factory in Danli once a month, I jumped at the chance. I wanted to see how these great cigars were made.

My trip launched from the base at 6:30 a.m., and I was glad I ate breakfast before I left. The drive is nearly four hours long to Danli, winding through mountain ranges east of Tegucigalpa, and close to Nicaragua's border. Only seven of us made the trek on this tour — 1LT Tom Lark, CW3 John Hager, SGT Marie Best, SPC Jeremy Heckler and myself plus our tour guide, Esly Rodriguez, and a driver. Hager, Lark and Rodriguez helped organize the first cigar tour to the factory about four or five months ago.

On that first trip, the trio and a group

of others spent several hours lost in Danli, looking for Tabacos Rancho Jamastrán, the premier cigar factory in the town, and stumbled across a second factory, where they were lucky enough to receive a tour.

On this trip, the group saw hundreds of workers transforming cured tobacco into cigars. According to the tour guide, Danli cigar factories employ more than 15,000 cigar rollers. Most of the wrappers and workers at the factory were women, because women, as the factory's corporate brochure reads, have more delicate hands and "better judgment than men." The most difficult cigar to roll, according to the tour, is the torpedo, because no molds are used, and the roller must use the exact amount of tobacco when the cigars are bunched.

The tour included a stop in the sorting room, where women, called "*rezagadoras*," separate the cigars by shade and quality. Wrappers can have as many as 20 different shades, so the sorters ensure that each box has the same identical shade and texture. Another tour stop walked the group through a room where the cigars are placed in cellophane sleeves and boxed. A few members of the group "taste-tested" some of the Rancho Jamastrán's wares.

The company produces several well-known brands of cigars including Camacho, La Fontana, Baccarat, Don Macho, Valencia and Monte Carlo. I brought home a box of Baccarat *Belicosos*, a sweet-tasting torpedo.

Hager, a cigar aficionado, picked up two boxes of stogies, one of which contained the Camacho El Cesar — possibly the largest cigar I've ever had the privilege to behold. It's going to take the chief at least a week to just smoke one of those bad boys.

When I got back, I contemplated whether seven hours on the road was really worth it. It was a tortuous journey. Then I lit up my first torpedo that night, and decided it was definitely a good day. My Uncle Paul would be proud of me.



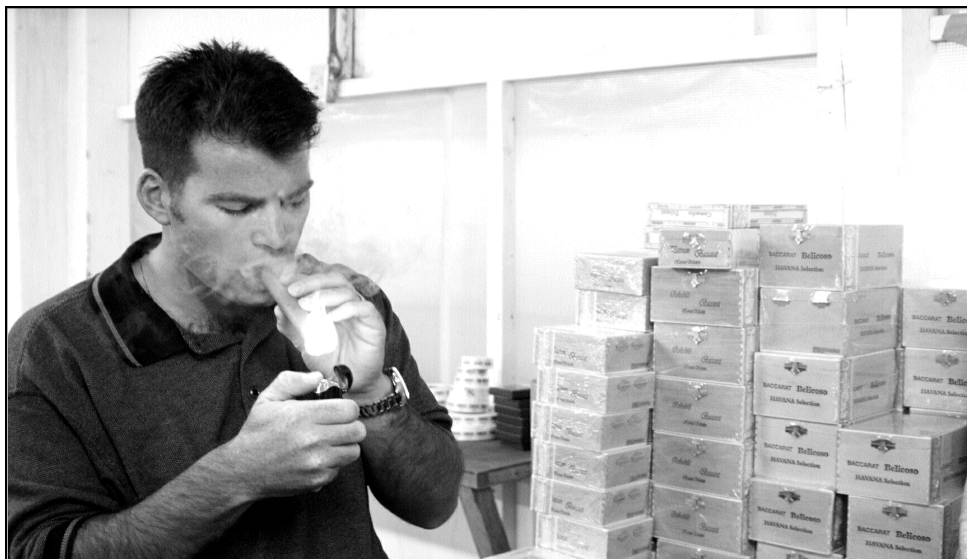
Photos by Master Sgt. Pat McKenna



(Top Right) One of Danli's 15,000 cigar rollers crafts a stogie at Tabácos Rancho Jamestran during a base tour conducted by MWR.

(Bottom Right) Delmi Gradiz, a *rezgadora*, sorts cigars by texture and shape.

(Lower Left) CW3 John Hager, of 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment, samples one of the final products.





## BRIEFS

### Gym Usage Policy

The fitness center is reserved for U.S. military personnel from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. Monday through Friday by order of the Joint Task Force-Bravo commander.

### Upper division college courses

The Education Center is requiring early tuition assistance (TA) reservations ASAP for those military personnel who want to enroll in upper level college courses (300-400 level). In the past, every upper level course offered was cancelled due to lack of payment/commitment by students. The following courses are possible, no guarantee, depending upon how many pay 25 percent up front before classes are confirmed for the January term. Early enrollment is key to ensure those classes are offered as soon as possible:

Business Management courses : 320 (Government Accounting ), 364 (Management & Organization Theory), 370 (Advanced Management)

Computer Science courses: 300 (Computer Data), 304 (Ethical Issues in Information Systems), 310 (Software/Hardware Concepts), 320 (Office Automation), 370 (Data Communications), 410 (Database Concepts), 430 (Information Systems & Security), 450 (Telecommunications Systems in Management).

If you need classes for your degree completion, please follow-up ASAP, or you will not meet the January deadline; some classes have prerequisites. For more information, contact Mo Eckols at ext.4495.

### Decorate tree at Oasis

The Oasis Club is hosting a Christmas Tree Decoration "Get Together" Sunday Dec. 17. The party starts at 6 p.m. and there will be free snacks and a DJ.

### Free Spanish booklets

The Soto Cano Air Base Education Center has made available for the first time the Spanish immersion beginning/intermediate quick conversational self-prep. Print your own copy, if you wish, by going to (1) My Computer; (2) H- Drive; (3) J-Staff; (4) Education Cen; (5) Conversational Spanish. For those officers pulling aviation night duty in the 1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment unable to attend Headstart classes, who requested copies for their unit, please ensure personnel are aware of this service, free and available 24 hours a day. For more information, call Mo Eckols at ext. 4495.

### Wood shop safety class

The wood shop safety class will be held Mondays and Thursdays at 6 p.m. in the base wood shop. The class is mandatory in order to sign for wood.

## Soldier's Christmas Carol

'Twas the night before Christmas,  
He lived all alone, in a one bedroom house made of  
plaster and stone.  
I had come down the chimney with presents to give,  
and to see just who in this home did live.  
I looked all about, a strange sight I did see,  
no tinsel, no presents, not even a tree.  
No stocking by mantle,  
just boots filled with sand,  
on the wall hung pictures of far distant lands.  
With medals and badges, awards of all kinds,  
a sober thought came through my mind.  
For this house was different,  
it was dark and dreary,  
I found the home of a soldier,  
once I could see clearly.  
The soldier lay sleeping,  
silent, alone, curled up on the floor  
in this one bedroom home.  
The face was so gentle,  
the room in such disorder,  
not how I pictured a United States soldier.  
Was this the hero  
of whom I'd just read?  
Curled up on a poncho,  
the floor for a bed?  
I realized the families  
that I saw this night,  
owed their lives to these soldiers  
who were willing to fight.  
Soon 'round the world,

the children would play,  
and grownups would celebrate  
a bright Christmas day.  
They all enjoyed freedom  
each month of the year,  
because of the soldiers,  
like the one lying here.  
I couldn't help wonder how many lay alone,  
on a cold Christmas Eve in a land far from home.  
The very thought brought a tear to my eye,  
I dropped to my knees and started to cry.  
The soldier awakened and I heard a rough voice,  
"Santa don't cry, this life is my choice;  
I fight for freedom, I don't ask for more,  
my life is my god, my country, my corps."  
The soldier rolled over and drifted to sleep,  
I couldn't control it,  
I continued to weep.  
I kept watch for hours, so silent and still  
and we both shivered from the cold night's chill.  
I didn't want to leave on that cold, dark, night,  
this guardian of honor so willing to fight.  
Then the soldier rolled over,  
with a voice soft and pure, whispered,  
"Carry on Santa, it's Christmas day, all's secure."  
One look at my watch, and I knew he was right.  
"Merry Christmas my friend,  
and to all a good night."

-author unknown  
submitted by SSG Samuel Popple  
1st Battalion, 228th Aviation Regiment

### Holiday chapel schedule

#### Dec. 24

8:15 a.m. Catholic Mass  
11 a.m. Protestant Service  
1 p.m. Gospel Service  
8 p.m. Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

#### Dec. 25

12 a.m. Christmas Eve Mass at Cathedral (Comayagua)  
9 a.m. Christmas Mass

#### Dec. 27

12 p.m. Catholic Mass

#### Dec. 31

8:15 a.m. New Year's Eve Mass  
11 a.m. New Year's Eve Worship

#### Jan. 1

12 p.m. New Year's Dinner at Missionary Home

## Toys for Tots seeks holiday donations

By SPC Jeremy Heckler  
Iguana Editor

Each year, the Marine Corps Reserves sponsors the Toys for Tots drive, benefiting the children of less fortunate families.

Marines from Joint Security Forces picked up the Toys for Tots drive tradition at Soto Cano. Marines collected 100 toys and other articles. Those toys were donated to a Bacto Biblico de Santidad in Comayagua. Since that trip, the Marines donation box at the JSF office has been empty.

"Our box has been empty for a couple of weeks," said Sgt. Steve Strauchen, Joint Security Forces.

According to their official website, Toys for Tots began in 1947 when a group of Marine Reservists from Los Angeles, California collected and distributed 5,000 toys to needy children. The 1947 campaign was so successful that the Marine Corps Reserves adopted Toys for Tots in 1948 and expanded it into a nationwide campaign. Their goal is to make it possible for children to have something for Christmas.

That year, Marine Corps Reserve units across the nation conducted Toys for Tots campaigns in each community in which a reserve unit was located. Marines have conducted successful nationwide campaigns at Christmas each year since 1948.

Last year, Marines and volunteers distributed over 13.8 million toys to nearly 5.9 million needy children.

"This is something we do at our home units," said Strauchen. "We came here and saw a need more so than back home."

For many, the sight of Marines and the Toys for Tots barrel is a familiar sight. Here, due to duty obligations, the Marines have had to rely on word of mouth and local advertising.

"I think that the lack of response is due to a lot of personnel on TDY or on leave during the holidays," said Gunnery Sgt. Thomas Ballentine, JSF. He added that others might not be sure about what to give. Ballentine said that in addition to toys, they also are accepting clothing, canned goods and other nonperishable food items. Donations can be made to the JSF office or the box in the PX.

The drive will continue through the holiday season until the Marines leave Soto Cano on Jan. 20.